1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

most of the over-tones, I never spoke it more than very haltingly. Lepcha is a simple language structurally, but the labour of learning by heart several thousand vocables which it was impossible to connect with any language system I knew was a hard one. Fearing my working knowledge of the language might be inadequate I therefore took with me into Sikkim as an interpreter a young Lepcha named Sukra Singh who was being trained as a dispenser. His knowledge of English, though not profound, was adequate, and I was always able to check up on his not infrequent mistranslations. In the event, the presence of this interpreter proved very useful. The Lepchas have a tendency to monologue, for one person to speak continuously while the rest listen. If I can so express it, the Lepchas talk in paragraphs, and not in single sentences; they fall naturally into a long swinging rhythm, and much dislike being interrupted or held up in the middle of a narrative or anecdote. I found I could not possibly keep up my notes and a conversation at the same time; but the Lepchas found it an easy matter to make a long statement and then pause while the statement was repeated. Since none of the Lepchas of Lingthem had had any but the most casual contact with Europeans—indeed most of the men and all the women had never seen one before—they had no set ideas of the way Europeans behave. They have however in their mythology and stories the tradition of nobles (into which group we naturally fell as being under the protection and recommendation of the Maharajah) being accompanied by servants, and doing all business through their intermediary. Without the use of an interpreter who, with his repetitions which I hardly listened to, would slow down the pace of a conversation sufficiently for me to take full notes, I could never have taken down the life-histories and elaborate ritual in anything like such full detail. When he was not present I had to ask people to wait, or to repeat themselves; the Lepchas disliked this, just as much as they disliked questions demanding a direct answer; they were quickly disconcerted and lost the thread of their narrative. Until I knew people well I asked as few questions as possible; as far as possible I checked and counter-checked every statement, but this was mostly done spontaneously by different Lepchas discussing identical subjects, or by their arguing among themselves. The most I would do with strangers was to suggest a subject for discussion; I only cross-examined those people with whom I had already a confidential relationship.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

for women other than their wives produce and have produced many disquieting situations, sometimes leading to open disputes and even suicide.[10] Such disturbances can however be put down to uncontrollable personal temperaments, which go strongly against the Lepcha ideal of behaviour; the regulations of the Lepchas have been devised to reduce to a minimum the conflict and aggression within the group. This has not however been followed by added aggression to people outside the group; William Sumner's generalisation[11] does not hold good here, possibly because through the greater part of their history Lepchas have only had slight and intermittent contact with other groups. Practically all the aggression manifested by the Lepchas is directed against and is supposed to originate from hostile supernaturals. Historically Lepchas have nearly always answered outside aggression by retreating and hiding in the forest; and in the semi-historical stories which they recount about the invading Tibetans or Nepali or Bhutanese, the Lepchas get the better of their enemies, not by violence but by cunning—through cutting off the water supply, shooting fire into the fortress, blocking up mountain paths, and similar devices.

It is worth noting that the Lepchas who live in mixed communities, though they generally know of the theoretical right of access to potential spouses, all deny with great apparent sincerity that these rights are ever taken advantage of; many who have imbued the views of their neighbours the Tibetans or Nepali, regard them with horror. The Lepchas of Zongu themselves are culturally tolerant and know that their neighbours have different rules of conduct; for example the Tibetans forbid the marriage of aunt and nephew, but both they and the Nepali permit the marriage of first cousins which for the Lepchas is the most horrifying form of incest. The habits of other races, particularly the Tibetans, are a fairly constant subject of conversation; many of these habits are viewed with disgust, but disgust tempered by considerable amusement.

In the case of two or more marriages taking place within the same generation of two groups, the levirate and sororate claims are readjusted to meet the situation; for example if two brothers marry two sisters, the younger brother will not have the right of access to or be able to inherit his elder brother's wife, because she

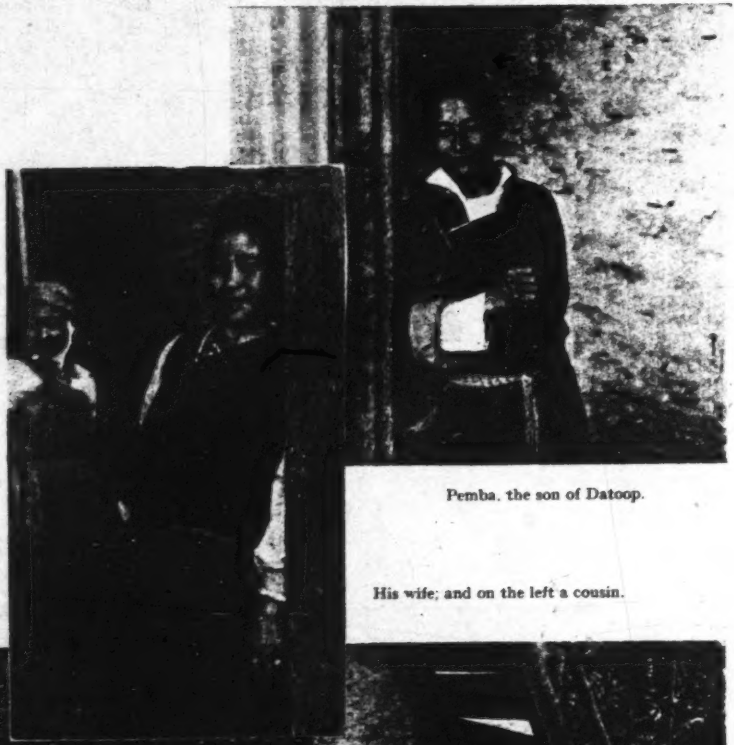
[10] Instances of these disruptive situations are given further on in this chapter and in Chapter Fifteen.

[11] 'The relation of comradeship and peace in the we-group and that of hostility and war towards others-groups are correlative of each other.' W. Sumner: *Folkways* (Boston 1906), p. 12.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

142
291

[301]



Pemba, the son of Datoop.

His wife; and on the left a cousin.

[311]

[415]

Conversation piece.

[facing p. 96]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5
Nepal AK1

and it is worth noting that their houses contain no such ventilation. They are, moreover, in the habit of stopping up every crevice and crack with rags or paper, and in addition sleep with their heads completely covered, neither of which does the Lepcha do. The Lepcha house, moreover, has a wooden floor, through the joints of which, since the house is raised off the ground, air can also enter. The Nepali house, on the contrary, is built flush with the ground and has a floor of rammed earth smeared over with a mixture of mud and cow-dung; this last for ceremonial cleanliness.

24th March:

We went this morning to watch a house being re-roofed. It belonged to Pemba, Pichi's Lama brother. When we arrived at about nine o'clock some twenty men, including a number of Lamas, were already putting on new rafters. Only two women were present: Pemba's wife and mother; but others will turn up later, to help in the actual thatching. No payment is made to the helpers; but in addition to being fed while they are working they are given a feast on the conclusion of the work.

Women started to arrive about ten o'clock, and at once started to light fires and prepare the gargantuan meal which seems to be the usual complement of such occasions. Everyone appeared to be completely sober (an unusual state of affairs); but as soon as the women arrived sex was, as usual, the chief topic of conversation. Whenever a woman came anywhere near she would invariably be greeted with some obscene remark, at which all the others would laugh. The greatest joke seemed to be to induce the girls to go up on to the roof, so that men working below could pass personal remarks on such parts of their anatomy as were visible. I must say, however, that the girls seemed ready to play. At one time Pemba's mother, a most efficient and able woman, told the workers to press the thatch well down. "You come up here and we'll press things down all right," somebody shouted. This remark, to which she took not the slightest exception,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

was greeted with much giggling laughter, which seems to be reserved exclusively for this type of joke.

I was told that there was no one in charge of the work, and certainly did not hear anyone giving any sort of order. In spite of this, however, there was no fuss or bother; everyone seemed to know exactly what to do.

The material for roofing this house had been gradually collected during the past three months. We noticed one old man sitting apart, about a hundred yards away up the hill. He was preparing the canes for making the ties. We wondered why he was all alone. "So as not to attract the notice of any government official who might pass this way," he said. This appeared a most unlikely contingency, unless he thought we were spies; but since cane is a forest product, and therefore the property of the State, it should not rightfully be used without permission. This prohibition also applies of course to firewood; but in that case appears to be disregarded.

The thatch, by means of two overlaps, is of three thicknesses. It is not fixed to the rafters but is roughly kept in place with a long stick tied right across it. It is made from a special kind of bamboo only found high up in the forest. This is cut into four-feet lengths, split, soaked in water, and bent double while still green. It is placed on the roof with the inner surface outside, so that the rain is carried off the roof by what is, to all intents and purposes, a series of open bamboo drains.

As soon as the rafters and cross-pieces had been prepared the women joined in the work, the heavy bundles of thatch being first carried up to the attic by men. Pemba's father took no part and spent most of his time repairing a hedge round the house, in which he was assisted by his youngest son. The whole roof had been stripped off before we arrived; but one small corner had been left, as protection in case the new roof was not completed by nightfall.

I noticed that a bullock's horn had been fastened over the door. This is known as *Gusung*, and is meant to frighten devils. There is no ceremony in connection with its use; but

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

597 A childless couple nearly always adopt a child, usually that of some near relation. It often happens that a woman gives birth to a child of her own a few years after she and her husband have already adopted one. An adopted son is better than none; but there is no doubt that the practice is to a great extent resorted to in the hope of getting a child of one's own. This belief is so common that even among Lepcha Christians in the Gangtok district (so Miss Scott tells me) it is common for people to adopt a child temporarily, on the understanding that it is returned to its parents as soon as the adopting mother gives birth to a child of her own. In Jongu, however, the adopted child [428] does not normally return to its own parents and remains the legal heir of its adopting father, even should he later have a son of his own.

883 Of adolescence there is little to be said except that it does 831 not seem to result in psychological disturbance such as is common in our society. But there is, of course, here no ● [521] sexual repression at any time of life. Sex is, indeed, almost the people's sole recreation, and the most common topic of conversation on practically every occasion. This state of affairs is more commonly associated with a society such as our own, in which sexual experience is, to a great extent, denied to the young. One would not expect to find it in a primitive culture in which at no time is there the slightest difficulty in indulging in sex to the body's content. It should [212] be realised, however, that the Lepchas have no mental 535 occupation whatsoever. They do not read; they do not even dance, except on rare ceremonial occasions, and once the day's work in the fields is done there is only drinking and sex. Whether this is or is not a desirable state of affairs I leave it to the reader to judge; but at least the people are free from the evils which undoubtedly result from the unfulfilled desires aroused by the erotic stimulation of the cinema and such-like shows.

582 Marriage usually takes place between the ages of fifteen 584 and twenty, and is generally arranged by the parents of the

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

cloth, but I do not think she was really shy: this was merely 587
the attitude proper to such an occasion.

The chanting and music continued at intervals; and still [781]
no one paid any attention. A little later Ongden himself
came in and sat down on the floor at the end of the row of
the bride's attendants. His entry did not seem to be in any
way formal; but almost as soon as he was seated the bride's
Pi-bo got up and made a short speech. While this was in
progress general conversation ceased: but before it was
finished one of the Lamas cut in with what was obviously [831]
an obscene remark, whereupon everybody started talking
again.

Nothing further happened until 4.30, when the ceremony
of killing the bullock (as already described) was performed.
By this time we were feeling so battered that a short rest
was imperative if we were to take an intelligent interest in
the evening's proceedings.

We returned at 7.30. Both the kitchen and altar-rooms
were now completely filled with people and the smoke was
so dense that one could only with difficulty see across the
room. Most of those present were now in a semi-maudlin
state; but quite a few had already passed out and lay snoring
peacefully on the floor. Conversation was being carried on [521]
in a subdued undertone: even when under the influence of
drink these people never seem to raise their voices, and still
talk quietly and without losing their tempers. As we arrived
Chotembu's wife was doing her drunken best to sing, at the
same time dancing slowly round the room so far as the
crowd permitted. At one time she came and stood in front
of us and improvised a verse or two. We could not induce
anyone to translate; but I gather the purport was obscene,
since it caused much laughter. In the kitchen room a meal
was being prepared and would later be served to all the
guests. Several people were fast asleep on the floor among
the bullock's intestines and bloody head, a grotesque sight
in the flickering half-light of the smoky fire.

There were no further ceremonies and we left at midnight,